

(Washington, DC)- A provision with the intent of disenfranchising low-income, minority, and elderly voters was attached to the GSE Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005 (H.R. 1461), passed by the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this week. H.R. 1461 established a new regulator for Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs) Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and also created an affordable housing fund under which 5 percent of profits made by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac would be used for affordable housing.

However, under the controversial provision, non-profit institutions that receive any of this funding, including community development organizations or faith-based groups that provide housing, would be prohibited from engaging in a wide range of political activities, including nonpartisan efforts such as registering voters and driving voters to the polls. These same groups would also not be allowed to have any affiliation with any other group who engaged in these civic activities.

"The provision infringes on the constitutional right of community-based housing groups to assist citizens in the voting process," said Congresswoman Gwen Moore. "This poison pill, added to H.R. 1461 by the Republicans at the eleventh hour, is meant to disenfranchise the very voters that the Republican Party fears: the elderly, poor, and minorities."

The conservative Republican Study Committee pressured the House leadership at the last minute to include this political activities gag rule to the bill which had previously enjoyed bipartisan support. Not only would non-profit institutions be barred from political activities in the future, but any non-profits that had engaged in voter-registration or get-out-the-vote efforts in the previous year would be ineligible from receiving the funds.

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